

WASHINGTON, DC—Congressman Peter DeFazio and Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley sent a letter to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) urging them to find funds to dredge the Port of Port Orford before it becomes unusable and threatens the local economy. DeFazio, Wyden, and Merkley asked the USACE to add funds to dredge the Port of Port Orford to another shallow water dredging contract on the nearby Chetco River. This would save the USACE \$400,000 in the long-term and preserve this vital resource.

“The Port of Port Orford is a critical lifeline that fuels the local economy, keeps over a hundred fishermen working, and keeps this community alive. We are urging the Army Corps of Engineers to add this shallow water dredging project to the contract already servicing the Chetco River. It will save the Corps money in the long-term and fulfill its commitment to safeguard our infrastructure in ports both big and small,” said DeFazio.

“Whether it’s maintaining jetties or dredging harbors, keeping coastal ports open for business is a federal obligation and is money well spent,” Wyden said. “Ensuring that ports such as Port Orford remain operational helps drive the local economy, save existing jobs, create new jobs and generate economic development at a time we need it most.”

“Oregonians living in coastal communities depend upon the dredging of their ports so they can support their families,” said Merkley. “Without proper dredging, rural communities like Port Orford see their economies dry up. We cannot allow the Port of Port Orford to become unusable and cost further job loss. We need to continue investing in Oregon’s coastal communities and dredging our small ports is one of the most critical things we can do.”

A group of Port Orford fishermen has organized a petition on change.org. Community members can show support for the project by signing the petition at: <http://www.change.org/petitions/army-corps-of-engineers-keep-the-port-in-port-orford>

Text of the DeFazio, Wyden, Merkley letter is below:

July 12, 2012

The Honorable Jo-Ellen Darcy

Assistance Secretary of the Army, Civil Works

108 Army Pentagon

Washington, DC 20310-0108

Dear Ms. Darcy:

We are writing to request the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) consider using any unallocated funds for dredging at the Port of Port Orford. The Port is in dire need of dredging and will soon be unusable.

The Port of Port Orford, located in Port Orford, Oregon, is unique in that it has no harbor so it is directly exposed to the Pacific Ocean. It is also the only port on West Coast that uses a dolly dock to retrieve boats out of the water once they enter the Port.

According to the Port, it hosts 60 commercial fishing vessels that employ 120 individuals. Their catch value was \$5 million last year. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and Oregon State University have also based research operations at this port to study the new Redfish Rocks Marine Reserve.

As early as 1873, the USACE began developing plans to construct and build a breakwater at Port Orford to protect it from waves. By 1935, a breakwater was built by "local interests" to protect a pier, but it was not completely effective. The USACE then built a 550 foot extension of the breakwater in 1968, but that extension caused the Port to infill with sand.

Emergency dredging took place in 1970, but the problem of sand infiltration did not abate. A 1981 USACE study of shoaling at this Port noted that breakwaters are a good tool to protect against waves. However, if such structures are constructed on “a shoreline with a substantial littoral sediment transport,” and “no other measures are taken,” sediment deposition will begin to accumulate and infill the channel. This is the case at the Port of Port Orford, in part because of the lengthened breakwater.

We have each have worked diligently during our tenures in Congress to secure federal funds to dredge small ports along Oregon’s south coast. Administration after administration, regardless of party, has failed to budget needed funds for even the most modest of dredging projects in this area despite having research in-hand that clearly demonstrates its own past construction work exacerbates the need for ongoing dredging. We have had to fight nearly every year to secure funds in the congressional budget process for this work. These federal funds are essential to keep our ports open and safe, and to ensure Oregon’s coastal communities are able to thrive.

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Last January, the USACE did not allocate a portion of its \$30 million in the FY 2012 Energy and Water Appropriations bill for shallow draft ports to the Port of Port Orford for dredging. The USACE Portland District has since scheduled the hopper dredge, YAQUINA, to dredge several ports along Oregon’s coast. Even if the USACE Portland District had the financial resources to dredge Port Orford, it is too shallow for the YAQUINA to enter. It requires a clamshell or a similar dredge to get in and do the work.

We have recently learned that the USACE Portland District will be letting an emergency contract to have a private clamshell dredge areas of the Checto River in Oregon. This work is part of an emergency clean-up effort from last year’s tsunami. The USACE Portland District says it will cost an extra \$800,000 to include dredging at the Port of Port Orford in this contract. A stand-alone contract would cost an additional \$400,000.

We respectfully request you consider allocating any unused USACE funds to include the Port of Port Orford in this dredging contract. We are well aware that USACE budgets have been underfunded for too many years leaving many worthy projects short of needed maintenance funds. However, we are convinced this request deserves additional consideration. The Port is

the community's lifeline. Failing to dredge a port that experiences rapid sand infiltration as direct a result of a past USACE construction project seems unreasonable.

We also request you view this video made by community residents about current conditions at the Port. It highlights the need for this work: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVewO9qo0f0> .

We are available to further discuss this matter with you either in person or over the phone.

Sincerely,

RON WYDEN

JEFF MERKLEY

PETER DeFAZIO

United State Senator

United State Senator

Member of Congress

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